

NONFICTION

PAUL ASHDOWN and EDWARD CAUDILL

Imagining Wild Bill: James Butler Hickok in War, Media, and Memory

Southern Illinois University Press
Paperback, 253 pages, \$26.50
SIUPress.com

James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok has been the subject of myriad biographies and other alleged factual accounts – not to mention depictions in movies and novels – and authors Paul Ashdown and Edward Caudill examine most of them in this spirited, frank and engaging look at how Hickok has been depicted and mythologized before and after he was shot dead in 1876. "Hickok is best understood not as a historical figure in his own right," the authors say, "but as a myth contrived in the mass media." *Imagining Wild Bill* is often a fun read, but the scholarship and insights Ashdown and Caudill have provided make this an important addition to anyone interested in this Western icon.

– Johnny D. Boggs

MAX BACA with CRAIG HARRIS
Crossing Borders: My Journey in Music

University of New Mexico Press
Paperback, 184 pages, \$19.95
UNMPress.com

This is a rather informal memoir by Albuquerque, New Mexico, native Max Baca, one of the great bajo sexto players. (For the innocent among us, the bajo sexto is a 12-string instrument shaped like a guitar but tuned an octave lower.) Baca tells the tale in his own words – childhood, family, friends and music. Born in 1967, Baca's musical life began early. Before he was 10, his dad bought him a pawn-shop bass guitar. Pop said they had three gigs in a week, and little Max had better be ready. Baca did mostly Tex-Mex and conjunto music (conjunto refers to a small musical group, usually accordion, bajo sexto, drums and bass), although there was almost nothing he wouldn't try. He became close friends with accordionist Flaco Jimenez, and over the years

played with Peter Rowan, the Texas Tornados, the Beach Boys, Rolling Stones, Dolly Parton and more. *Crossing Borders* is an interesting and easy read, and a good contribution to the history of Tex-Mex and conjunto music.

– Ralph Estes

SANDY BARNARD

George Armstrong Custer: A Military Life

South Dakota Historical Society Press
Paperback, 210 pages, \$14.95
SDHSPress.com

Another Custer book? While there has been a lot of ink spilled on the man's life and death, Sandy Barnard has produced a valuable addition to the list of Custer biographies. This slender, well-written volume has a narrow focus on his military career, tracing it from West Point through the Civil War, the Plains Wars, to the end at Little Big Horn. Barnard, a prolific scholar, reaches the cautious conclusion that his subject was a flawed but fundamentally decent fellow asked to do unsavory things in the national interest. One of the most valuable aspects of this book is its approachability for readers new to the material. The author identifies scholarly points of dispute and debunks conspiracy theories that nonspecialists would overlook. His research is deep, his prose fluid, and his subject matter still endlessly fascinating.

– David C. Beyreis

J. BRADFORD BOWERS

Bound by Steel & Stone: The Colorado-Kansas Railway and the Frontier of Enterprise in Colorado, 1890-1960

Timberline Books/University Press of Colorado
Hardcover, 285 pages, \$45
UPColorado.com

The Colorado-Kansas Railway's founders conceived the grandiose scheme of running trains and electricity lines from Pueblo, Colorado, eastward down the Arkansas River and into western Kansas. Instead, the short line ran 23 miles northwest to local quarries in the foothills of the Rockies and survived by hauling sandstone construction blocks and firebrick clay to its interface

in Pueblo with the Santa Fe and other mainline railroads. The little outfit struggled along with one secondhand coal-fired locomotive, one passenger car and 15 assorted freight cars. The Colorado-Kansas stayed in business as long as it did due to the management skills of Irma MacDaniel. She began as secretary for the lawyer who represented the railroad at its founding and ended as the president of the line overseeing its dissolution. J. Bradford Bower's comprehensive research, well written and supported by pertinent maps and illustrations, makes *Bound by Steel & Stone* an important addition to the history of America's railroads.

– Robert Lee Murphy

DON BULLIS

No Manure on Main Street: An Historian's Diary of Western Movies

Rio Grande Books
Paperback, 459 pages, \$32.95
RioGrandeBooks.com

Don Bullis isn't a film critic/historian, but a Western historian who doesn't hide his opinions. That's what makes this book an atypical filmography. As Ollie Reed Jr., a former newspaper film critic, notes in his introduction: "It's like sitting at a table across from Don ... chewing on what you both like about Westerns and what you never will agree on." Bullis tackles roughly 220 Western theatrical movies, radio shows and TV productions, so don't expect a comprehensive study. *Winchester '73* is mentioned in passing. TV's *Gunsmoke* is included; *The Virginian* isn't. An early John Wayne programmer, *The Star Packer*, is here, but no *Cimarron* (1931), the first Western to win a Best Picture Oscar. Bullis doesn't like *The Searchers*, so he'll win over WWA member Kirk Ellis. Scratch that. Bullis doesn't mention director Budd Boetticher's *Ride Lonesome* and "lost interest after the first fifteen minutes" of *Comanche Station*. Dear Don: Avoid Boetticher protégé Kirk Ellis. The book is all in good fun, but *Big Jake*, Don, is not better than *Rio Bravo*. However, you're 100 percent right about *Lonely are the Brave*.

– Johnny D. Boggs